

LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS
155 Merrimack Street
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852

Paul Schlichtman
Coordinator of
Research, Testing and Assessment

Tel: (978) 674-2129
E-Mail:
pschlichtman@lowell.k12.ma.us

TO: Jeannine Durkin, Superintendent of Schools
FROM: Paul Schlichtman
RE: Joann B. Nichols – Permission to Conduct Research
DATE: April 22, 2019

Dr. Joann B. Nichols is an associate professor of education at Fitchburg State University. Her current research focuses on the use of reading partner therapy dogs.

Dr. Nichols has a prior working relationship at the Pawtucketville Memorial Elementary School, supervising a student teacher. Based on her relationship, she is interested in conducting research by bringing her reading partner therapy dog to the Pawtucketville for the purpose of understanding how reading to the dog can influence a child's improvement in reading.

This is a thoughtful, professional proposal that conforms to Policy LC, as well as our policy regarding Animals in Schools (File IMG). Dr. Nichols has incorporated sufficient safeguards to gain permission from parents, and to avoid contacts with children who have allergies of an aversion to dogs and will follow the district policy pertaining to therapy dogs. She has also provided proof of a Chelmsford dog license and rabies vaccination.

Principal Mathew McLean has provided a letter of support for this work.

I recommend positive action on her research request.

Research Proposal to the Lowell, Massachusetts Public Schools

Good day,

My name is Dr. Joann B. Nichols, Associate Professor of Education at Fitchburg State University. I am proposing a research study in reading partner therapy dog effects at Pawtucketville Memorial School in Fall, 2019. I hope to increase professional knowledge of the teaching and learning process and the social settings in which they operate.

My dog, Beauty, is a certified reading partner therapy dog, registered with Dog B.O.N.E.S. of Massachusetts (<http://www.therapydog.info>). She is legitimately trained, tested, insured, and accordingly well-behaved with specific behaviors applicable to her work, and she has visited classrooms in the McKay Arts Academy in Fitchburg regularly for four years. She is my third registered therapy dog, with my previous work experience (in addition to my doctorate in education) as the program coordinator for the volunteer program, "Pets and People." In keeping with the "IMG-Animals in School" policy, for this study, participating families will have informed consent and be able to identify animal allergy concerns.

The proposed family consent form and support letter from the Pawtucketville Memorial administration is enclosed. In addition is documentation of Beauty's vaccination and town licensure.

The object of the research is to gather data on the effects of children's reading to the trained dog. While the anecdotal evidence of Beauty's benefit to children's reading at Fitchburg is positive, I have been awarded a university sabbatical in the Fall, 2019 semester (September to December) to explore if children's reading aloud comfort, fluidity, and prosody (level of expression) are improved by reading to the animal, as opposed to having the animal merely present for interaction, or no animal presence at all. Children's attitudes toward reading aloud will also be explored, in keeping with the objectives of garnering knowledge about the social settings of learning.

The research will maintain the children's privacy and use testing methods that are already in place, and/or minimally intrusive. It will also contribute to the more general welfare of children and their education in that there is little valid, active research on children's reading aloud skills, behaviors, and attitudes when reading to a dog, as opposed to interacting with a therapy dog. Consequently, we will attempt an initial volley into the question of the effect of the dog's unconditional acceptance—is it a benefit to read to the animal, or does the interaction alone produce the postited effect?

In choosing a location for the study, knowing that good data could only be collected with at least twice-weekly repeated visits, I approached Meghan Branco and Wendy Gregiore at the Pawtucketville School because of my past experience there supervising a student teacher. I appreciated the warm atmosphere and the proximity to my home was more suited to frequent trips for Beauty.

The study plan will be cleared through the Fitchburg State University IRB (Internal Review Board-Human Subjects Committee) who will also review it for human subject appropriate practice.

Enclosed with this proposal is an executive summary of the plan of research.

I appreciate your consideration of my project.

Dr. Joann B. Nichols (978 852 6448) jnicho21@fitchburgstate.edu

Executive Summary of “The Effects of a Reading Partner Therapy Dog on Children’s Reading Aloud”

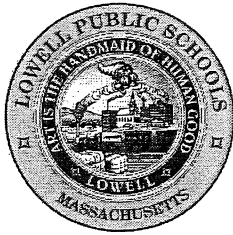
Investigator Background: Dr. Joann B. Nichols, Associate Professor of Education at Fitchburg State University, has a doctoral degree in Education with specialties in Early Childhood Education and reading instruction. After seven years at FSU, she has been granted a university sabbatical for Fall, 2019 in order to pursue research in children’s reading prosody and attitudes. She has been associated with therapy dog programs, owned three therapy dogs, and owns a registered Reading Partner Therapy Dog, Beauty, who is a five-year-old golden retriever, experienced in reading partner therapy with elementary children.

Object of the Research: To gather data on children’s reading after “treatment” with a reading partner therapy dog, exploring changes in prosody (verbal expression), fluidity, and attitudes about and comfort levels with reading aloud. Literature reviews of the effects of children reading to dogs shows that there is growing interest in this area, and postulated benefits to both reading skills and social health. Yet, there is little evidence with appropriate controls, standard measures, group size, or duration that allows causal inference on how reading to dogs may benefit reading instructional practices (Hall, Gee, & Mills (2016). *“Children reading to dogs: A systematic review of the literature*, PLoS ONE(2): e0149759. Doi: 10.1371/journal.pone). However, overall, review of the literature indicates reading to a dog has potential to bring significant improvement to children’s reading, and so warrants further exploration.

Research Method:

- Families of two second-grade classrooms at Pawtucketville Memorial Elementary School will receive an informed consent letter detailing the research study, requesting permission for each child’s participation, and identifying any allergy or other concerns.
- Second-grade children will take their regular reading assessments in September, 2019, the Fountas and Pinnell administered by the school reading specialist, Ms. Wendy Gregoire. The children participating in the study (two classrooms) will also be recorded on the “See Saw” app (a tool currently used in the school to collect data and record while maintaining their identity privacy) reading from a one-minute read-aloud assessment passage on “Raz-Plus,” the website resource for the Rasinski Words Correct Per Minute fluency standards.
- Teachers, administrators, and the school reading specialist will determine the exact schedule and choice of classrooms for the study, the goal being two visits each per week to two classrooms. Allergy or participation concerns will be addressed in this plan for chosen classrooms. Reading curriculum across the classrooms will be consistent in other respects.
 - In one classroom, the children will, during their normal reading block, take turns according to a teacher-determined schedule, reading for five-minute intervals to Beauty. The children would choose books they are currently working with and that are appropriately leveled. In the 2nd “control” classroom, the children would interact with Beauty as a therapy dog, taking five-minute turns brushing or petting her, but not necessarily reading to her. A third classroom would have no animal presence.
- Investigator will be introduced to participating children. Brief discussion questions will provide insight into children’s read aloud attitudes and comfort.
 - “Do you like to read out loud?” “How does reading out loud make you feel?”

- “Where is the best place to read out loud? And to whom?”
- “Do you read by yourself or to others outside of school time?”
- After a four-month period, from September until the end of December, 2019, the visits will end.
- Children will be assessed with the Fountas and Pinnell instrument as they normally would. The participating children will also repeat the Rasinski read aloud assessment passage and recording.
- Scores of the children’s assessments will be kept confidential, only numbers and percentages of change will be shared with the investigator. Recordings are catalogued by the See Saw app by code known only to teachers and reading specialist.
- Family survey and teacher interview will be conducted for anecdotal information on children’s read aloud attitudes with/without the reading partner animal
- After completion of testing, comparison in reading score data will be made between the following groups with allowance for typical reading improvement rates as identified by Fountas and Pinnell and Rasinski fluency standards.
 - Classroom reading to the animal
 - Classroom interacting with the animal
 - Classroom with no animal presence
- Quotes and anecdotal information will be collected from teacher interviews and parent questionnaires on read aloud attitudes and comfort levels (see enclosed questionnaire).
- Information will be shared with school teachers, specialists, administrators, and any interested families.
- Possible resultant journal article publication or university presentations will include no children’s identities. Any publications will be approved by Lowell School Committee and/or Pawtucketville staff.



Lowell Public Schools
Pawtucketville Memorial Elementary School
425 West Meadow Road Lowell, MA 01854
978-937-7667



Dr. Mathew McLean
Principal

Mrs. Meghan Branco
Assistant Principal

April 8, 2019

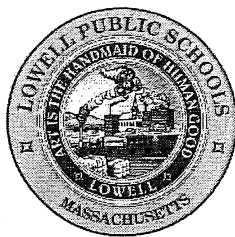
To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing to acknowledge my agreement to enter into a partnership with Dr. Joann Nichols for the Fall 2019 to participate in her study involving the reading growth of students with her therapy dog.

I will consult with the Lowell District Office to determine the steps needed to approve this project. The Pawtucketville is committed to making this study work.

Thank You,
Mathew McLean Ed.D

Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible



Lowell Public Schools
Pawtucketville Memorial Elementary School
425 West Meadow Road Lowell, MA 01854
978-937-7668



Dr. Mathew McLean
Principal

Mrs. Meghan Branco
Assistant Principal

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: The Effects of a Reading Partner Therapy Dog on Children's Reading Aloud
Investigator: Dr. Joann B. Nichols, Associate Professor, Education Department, Fitchburg State University
Phone: 978 665 3371 Email: jnicho21@fitchburgstate.edu

I am an associate professor in the teaching preparation program at Fitchburg State. I am conducting research into children's read aloud skills and expression as affected by my Reading Partner Therapy dog, Beauty. I would like you to consider allowing your child to participate. We are asking the question, "Does reading to a dog help read aloud skills?" Your child's participation would be a valuable contribution to research that helps us teach reading, teach teachers, and make safe and engaging environments for all children.

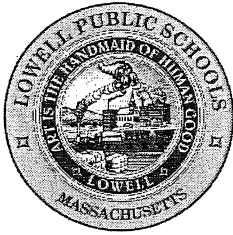
Beauty is a registered therapy dog with Dog B.O.N.E.S (<http://www.therapydog.info>) and is legitimately and professionally trained. She will visit two second-grade classrooms two times per week from September to December, 2019. Your child will either have the opportunity to read to Beauty or to interact with her as a therapy animal without reading. Participation will take place within the normal classroom periods. Your child's standard reading tests will be used before and after the four-month period to assess any effect. Your child will also be asked to read a grade-appropriate passage aloud into the "See Saw" app, a digital tool for collecting records, a simple task taking about two minutes. This read aloud would be done in September and again in December.

Your child's identity will be protected. The investigator will not be able to attach names to data. All testing and recording will be done by your child's teacher and/or reading specialist at Pawtucketville. There is minimal risk or disruption to your child's classroom day.

Your child's participation is voluntary. If you decide, or your child decides not to participate, it does not affect his standing in his class or alter his reading tests in any way, and your child may withdraw at any time if you change your mind.

The study has been cleared by the Lowell School Committee and the IRB (Internal Review Board) of Fitchburg State University for appropriate practices.

Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible



Lowell Public Schools
Pawtucketville Memorial Elementary School
425 West Meadow Road Lowell, MA 01854
978-937-7668



Dr. Mathew McLean
Principal

Mrs. Meghan Branco
Assistant Principal

If you have questions about the study or your child's participation, please contact me:
(Dr. Joann B. Nichols, (978) 665-3371, jnich021@fitchburgstate.edu).

If you decide that your child can participate, please print his/her name below and sign and date.

Please also indicate if there are any allergy issues
that might affect your child's participation.

Allergy to dogs: YES _____ NO _____

If yes...please contact your child's teacher or the
investigator above to discuss if your child should
participate and if there are accommodations that
can/should be made.

I give my permission for my child, named below, to participate in "The Effects of a Reading
Partner Therapy Dog on Children's Reading Aloud Study from September, 2019 to December,
2019.

Child's name: _____

Parent's printed name: _____

Parent's signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you,
Dr. Joann B. Nichols

Be Safe, Be Respectful, Be Responsible

Beauty

Registered with Dog B.O.N.E.S. (<http://www.therapydog.info>) as a "Reading Partner Therapy Dog"

5 years old, golden retriever



DRAFT:

Teacher Interview after "The Effects of a Reading Partner Therapy Dog on Children's Reading Aloud"

1. Did you feel that reading to the dog affected the reading performance of the children involved?

Examples?

2. In what ways did reading to the dog affect the children's reading performance?

3. In what ways did reading to the dog affect the children's attitudes toward reading? Reading aloud?

4. In what ways did reading to the dog affect the environment in which reading is taught?

Family Survey after "The Effects of a Reading Partner Therapy Dog on Children's Reading Aloud"

Thank you for allowing your child to participate in our study of the effects of reading to a dog for children. Sharing your answers to the following questions will help us learn more from the study.

1. Did your child discuss reading to the dog? If so, what did they say about it?

2. Do you feel that reading to the dog had an effect on your child's reading?

3. Do you feel that reading to the dog had an effect on your child's attitudes about reading? Reading aloud?

4. Do you feel that reading to the dog had any effect on your child's reading outside of school time?

ANIMALS IN SCHOOL

The Lowell School Committee is committed to providing a high quality educational program for all students and employees in a safe and healthy environment. No animal shall be brought to school without prior permission of the building principal.

School principals, in consultation with the Health Services Providers in each building, shall utilize the Massachusetts Department of Public Health publication "Animals in the Classroom: Recommendations for Schools" and review student health records to determine which animals may be allowed in the school building. The decision of the principal shall be final.

Educational Program

Use of animals to achieve specific curriculum objectives may be allowed by the building principal provided student health and safety is not jeopardized. The individual requesting that the animal be brought to school is responsible for adhering to "Animals in the Classroom: Recommendations for Schools" and any other conditions established by the principal to protect the health and well-being of students.

Student Health

The health and well-being of students are the District's highest priorities. Animals may cause an allergic reaction or otherwise impair the health of students. No animals may be brought to school or kept in the school, classroom, office or common area that may negatively impact the health of any student who must utilize that area. Animals that cause an allergic reaction or impair the health of students shall be removed from the school immediately so that no student shall have his/her health impaired nor less than fall access to available educational opportunities.

Conditions for Allowing Animals in School

In an effort to reduce the chances of transmitting rabies and other zoonotic diseases (those transmitted from animals to people) to staff and students, the following conditions must be met before allowing animals in the classroom:

- The principal of the building must approve all animals to be brought into the classroom.
- The animal (to be brought in) must have an educational purpose.
- The animal must be free of diseases and if applicable have a rabies certification.
- The animal must not be a wild or stray animal (dead or alive) unless under the control of a licensed professional.
- The animal must not be poisonous.
- Where appropriate, the source of the animal should be from a licensed professional company with certification of health.

Service Animals (Guide or Assistance Dogs)

The School Committee does not permit discrimination against individuals with disabilities, including those who require the assistance of a service animal. The district will comply with Massachusetts and federal law concerning the rights of persons with guide or assistance dogs and will permit such animals on school premises and school transportation.

For purposes of this policy, a service animal “includes any dog that has been individually trained to do the work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability.” The regulations further state that “a public entity shall make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures to permit the use of a miniature horse by an individual with a disability if the horse has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of the individual with the disability.”

Service animals perform some of the functions and tasks that individuals with disabilities cannot perform themselves. Service animals are not pets. There are several kinds of service animals that assist individuals with disabilities. Examples include, but are not limited to, animals that:

- assist individuals who are blind or have severe sight impairments as “seeing eye dogs” or “guide dogs”;
- alert individuals with hearing impairments to sounds;
- pull wheelchairs or carry and pick-up items for individuals with mobility impairments; and,
- assist mobility-impaired individuals with balance.

The district shall not assume or take custody or control of, or responsibility for, any service animal or the care or feeding thereof. The owner or person having custody and control of the animal shall be liable for any damage to persons, premises, property, or facilities caused by the service animal, including, but not limited to, clean up, stain removal, etc.

If in the opinion of the school principal or authorized designee, any service animal is not under the control of its handler, or if it is not housebroken, the service animal may be excluded from the school or program. The service animal can also be excluded if it presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school. The parent/guardian of the student having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the service animal from district premises immediately.

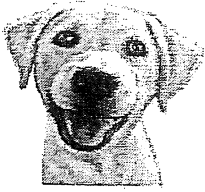
If any student or staff member assigned to the classroom in which a service animal is permitted suffers an allergic reaction to the animal, the person having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the animal to a different location designated by the building principal or designee. An alternative plan will be developed with appropriate district staff. Such plan could include the reassignment of the person having custody and control of the animal to a different classroom. This procedure will also apply if an individual on school transportation suffers an allergic reaction. In this case, an alternate plan will be developed in coordination with appropriate school, district, and transportation staff including the involvement of the parents/guardians of the student.

When a student will be accompanied by a service animal at school or in other district facilities on a regular basis, such staff member or such student’s parent/guardian, as well as the animal’s owner and any other person who will have custody and control of the animal, will be required to sign a document stating that they have read and understood the foregoing.

The superintendent of schools or her designee shall be responsible for developing procedures to accommodate a student's use or an employee's use of an assistance animal in district facilities and on school transportation vehicles.

SOURCE: MASC February 2011

Cross Ref: Latest revision of Ma DOH publication: "Animals in the Classroom: Recommendations for Schools"



Town Clerk's Office
50 Billerica Road
Chelmsford, MA 01824
(978)-250-5205

JOANN B NICHOLS

Date 01/14/19

81 OLD STAGE RD

CHELMSFORD MA 01824

Has, in accordance with the provisions of the Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts per MGL Ch. 140, s. 137 (a) and the Bylaws of the Code of the Town Of Chelmsford, been issued a license to keep the **DOG** described in the margin until the last day of the year **2019**. Said dog is numbered and registered as required by said laws for which the following fees have been paid:

License Fee ~~\$15.00~~

Late Fee

Citation Fee

Total \$75.00

License Tag No.	2019-0526
Dog Name	BEAUTY
Age	4 years, 11 months, and 20 days old.
Gender	Female
Coat Color	Gold,
Breed	Golden Ret

"The owner or keeper of a licensed dog shall cause it to wear around its neck or body a collar or harness ...to which shall be securely attached a tag in a form prescribed by and issued by the Town Clerk when a license is issued." Dogs six months old or older must be licensed with proof of current rabies per MGL Ch. 140, s. 137 (b).

Signs of Rabies - Unexplained aggression, impaired locomotion, varying degrees of paralysis, extreme depression or viciousness. The signs of rabies vary in animals. Some will display attack-like behavior while others appear sick or dazed.

Patricia Dzuris

Rabies Expiration	01/25/21
Veterinary Hospital	COUNTRYSIDE VET HOSPITAL

THIS LICENSE EXPIRES DECEMBER 31, 2019

Renew your dog license **EVERY** year. Licensing for 2020 starts December 1, 2019 through February 28, 2021



Certificate of Vaccinations

Date: 01-25-18

Countryside Veterinary Hospital
289 Littleton Rd
Chelmsford, MA 01824
978-256-9555

Tag Number: 10071

Date of Rabies Vaccination: 01-25-18

Next Rabies Vaccination On: 01-24-21

CLIENT INFORMATION

Joanne Nichols
81 Old Stage Road

Chelmsford, MA 01824
Phone: 978852-6448

PATIENT INFORMATION

PATIENT: BEAUTY
SPECIES: Canine
BREED: Golden Retrv
SEX: S
Color: Gold
WEIGHT: 82.00
AGE: 4Y
Microchip:

Rabies Vaccine Information:

Manufacturer: MERIA
Lot Expiration: 3/22/19

Serial Number: 18346A
Administered: RHSQ

This is to certify...

That the animal described above has received a Rabies vaccination.

Kerry Arsenault, DVM

License:

Reminders:

01-25-19
01-09-19

Heartworm Test
Annual Boarding Contract